



MISSION POSSIBLE

Leadership Skagit team gives apartment complex a place for safe play

By **RUSSELL HIXSON**

@Russell_SVH

MOUNT VERNON — Early Friday morning, children at the La Paloma apartments in the Kulshan neighborhood swarmed around laborers in black shirts as they toiled with shovels, brooms and an excavator.

If all goes according to plan in the coming months, the once-neglected patch of grass with its stones and a wooden structure will become a brand-new recreation area with picnic tables, barbecues and bike trails. Printed on the workers' shirts are tractors, mountains and tulips backlit by a burning morning sun. It reads, "Skagit Mission Possible."

As Kevin Meenaghan shoveled, he explained that he and four others formed the team as part of a Leadership Skagit project. Leadership Skagit is a nine-month business and community leadership program overseen by the Economic Development Association of Skagit County Foundation.

The Mission Possible team members all had similar interests in children, outdoor play and local agriculture; they decided the project would be a great way to support all three.

Many of the families who live in the neighborhood work in the agriculture industry.

"Our valley is supported by the great work of the agricultural community," Meenaghan said. "This is a chance for us to give back to them."

In January, the team met with families from the apartment complex to determine what would fit their needs. Kids drew pictures of the sort of things they want to run, jump and play on.

Parents talked about having a safe place where they could watch their kids play. Parents were specifically concerned with a roofed wooden structure on which numerous children have been



Photos by **Scott Terrell** / Skagit Valley Herald

ABOVE: Herb Silba of Simply Yards uses a small excavator Friday morning to tear apart a rock play area at the La Paloma apartments in Mount Vernon.

BELOW: Kevin Meenaghan shovels soil Friday morning at La Paloma apartments in Mount Vernon.



hurt.

Meenaghan said the project is designed to address these issues and make residents' input a reality.

The Leadership team is made

up of professionals from across the county. Lisa Knowles works for Chinook Enterprises, a company that provides employment for the disabled. She said she hopes

the project will help improve her leadership skills and connect with other leaders in the community.

Jon Gernondale, Kulshan Creek neighborhood resource officer, said the area used to be fenced off as part of Skagit Head Start, which has moved. To open up the area, the team took out the fence, which will likely be used for a community garden or at another housing project.

Gernondale said the project will be great for the 50 to 60 kids who call the apartment complex home. But a lot of work still needs to be done.

Meenaghan said the group will need to meet fundraising goals to complete the final two phases. He encouraged anyone interested in helping with the La Paloma project to send an email to teamskagit-missionpossible@gmail.com.